Balboa Park Carousel with a bit of Coronado History

Most people don’t notice the Balboa Park Carousel as they are speeding down Park Boulevard, but the carousel in Balboa Park has history dating back to 1910. Some of that history includes Coronado with a connection to Balboa Park via Tent City and the Panama-California Exposition of 1915-16.

The Balboa Park Carousel is 108 years old, built in 1910 by the Hurst & Spillman Company in North Tonawanda, New York. The parts and pieces of the carousel were shipped to Los Angeles where it was constructed and operated for a couple of years before being sold to a new owner and moved to Coronado’s Tent City in 1912. When the Panama-California Exposition opened in 1915 the carousel was moved to Balboa Park for two years before it went back to Tent City.

But it wasn’t done moving yet! In 1922 the carousel made the transit over the bay again, back to Balboa Park, this time to the current location of the Reuben H. Fleet Space Theater. In 1965 it was moved to its permanent location at the corner of Park Boulevard and Zoo Place.

The carousel was recognized in 1994 as a “Historically Significant Carousel in North America.” This version of the carousel is known as a menagerie model because other than horses, the seats include: a camel, cats, deer, dogs, dragon, frogs, giraffes, goat, lion, mules, ostriches, pigs, roosters, stork, tiger, zebras, and chariots, all original. Factoid: Merry-go-rounds go clockwise while carousels go counter-clockwise.

All the seats are hand-carved from English Lindenwood. The ride revolves at 13 miles per hour.
powered by the same General Electric motor installed in 1910. The carousel requires an elevator/roller coaster certification to operate. Also original on the carousel is the classic brass ring game for riders, the painted murals and the restored military band organ with 120 paper music rolls that are still played.

The Balboa Park Carousel, which has always has been privately owned, was acquired by Friends of Balboa Park in 2017. The non-profit's mission is to preserve Balboa Park's legacy for future generations. In acquiring the Balboa Park Carousel, the organization’s goal is to raise $3 million to finalize the purchase and repair, refurbish and preserve the carousel as an important part of Balboa Park's history, eventually leveraging the income from the operation of the carousel to pay for other capital improvements in Balboa Park. The Balboa Park Carousel is in good hands and needs our help. For more information about how you can contribute to preserving this history, go to friendsofbalboapark.org.

In this fast-paced world, a carousel ride is something we should all enjoy on occasion. To experience the carousel is truly a step back in time.

The next time you go to Balboa Park stop by and marvel at this incredible piece of history. With over 15 million rides so far, it's your turn to be a part of Balboa Park Carousel's history. Take a ride!